

# VALUE OF MORALITY IN MUSIC OF CONFUCIUS (551-479 BC)

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## Abstract

In line with the basic concept of "jen" and some things related to the virtue, Confucius emphasized on the maintenance of beauty and music. The emphasis of those two things illustrated the feeling of self-dualism that is morals and aesthetics. Talking about the development of one's personality, Confucius said, "Through the poetry one's attention will grow, through the various rites one's mentality will be set; through music one becomes perfect (Analects of Confucius, chapter 8, section 8). The maintenances of beauty and music were expected to be part of one's sublime nature and human civilization, according to Confucius, maintenance and reasonable combination between the yen and the beauty was indeed necessary for the self perfection and the improvement from disgraceful deeds. Just like a house with a strong base had certainly a proportional shape; then, one with his opportunities to do well was supposed to be able to express it with deep thoughts (feelings) and with good manners.

# NILAI MORALITAS DALAM MUSIK MENURUT KONFUSIUS (551-479 SM)

## Abstrak

Sejalan dengan konsep dasar dari "jen" dan beberapa hal yang berkaitan dengan kebaikan, Konfusius lebih menekankan pada pemeliharaan keindahan dan musik. Dua hal penekanan itu menggambarkan perasaan dualisme akan diri pribadi yaitu moral dan estetika. Membicarakan tentang perkembangan kepribadian seseorang, Konfusius berkata, "lewat puisi perhatian seseorang akan tumbuh, lewat berbagai upacara tabiat seseorang diatur; lewat musik seseorang menjadi sempurna (Ana-lects of Konfusius, bab 8, seksi 8). Pemeliharaan keindahan dan musik diharapkan mampu menjadi bagian dari sifat luhur seseorang dan peradaban masyarakat menurut Konfusius, pemeliharaan dan kombinasi yang wajar antara yen dan keindahan memang perlu untuk kesempurnaan diri dan perbaikan dari sifat-sifat tercela. Seperti halnya sebuah rumah dengan pondasi (dasar) yang kuat tentu memiliki bentuk yang menyenangkan maka seharusnya orang dengan kesempatan yang dimilikinya untuk berbuat baik mampu mengungkapkannya dengan pikiran yang mendalam (perasaan) dan dengan cara-cara yang baik).

**Keywords:** Confucius; Music; Aesthetics; Morals

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## INTRODUCTION

In the history of the Chinese nation, the role of the arts could not be ignored.

Almost all dynasties in China developed arts as richness and pride. Several types of arts were developed, such as paintings, ceramics, music, and drama. However, what

to remember was that the arts in China could not be removed from morals. Then, in Chinese philosophy *tao* was informing all reflection about arts and morals. One of the arts which was very significant in the history of the Chinese nation is music. Music could be easily found in all people's classes, ranging from ordinary people to the Royal family. Even, an emperor of Xuanzong, Li Longji, was the Emperor and a musician indeed (Strathern, 2001: 60).

Chinese traditional music had a long history, as well as other cultural heritages. At the beginning of its history, the sounds of music came from various daily tools. The Chinese community finally realized that those tools could produce beautiful sounds (Prier, 1991: 63). Day after day, those tools were to be unique instruments, which eventually formed the Chinese musical instruments. Kinds of ancient Chinese musical instruments are divided into four, namely percussion instruments, wind instruments, stringed instruments, and plucked instruments. Some of those instruments had roles in shaping the history of the Chinese nation. However, it could not be denied that the role of Chinese songs were also very significant. Music instruments and vocals were blended in shaping Chinese music culture in diversity (Prier, 1991: 60).

In addition to having the wealth of musical instruments and songs, one which was not to be denied in the history of Chinese music was the musical figures. Some ancient Chinese musicians were Yu Boya, Shi Kuang, Li Yannian, Cai Yong, Cai Wenji, Ji Kang Su Zhipo. However, there was a big thinker who has given colors in music history as well as the history of China. He was Confucius. The presence of Confucius in the music scene was very important since his teachings about music have always been associated with beauty and moral. His view was that the greatness of the Chinese nation could not be separated from the music; music has formed a distinctive character to the Chinese (Prier, 1991: 61).

There is an interesting one of Confucius. He knew a lot about life, but very few

people knew about his life instead. He left many advices for people, but few could understand the point of those advices (Fung Yu-Lan, 2007: 78-80). A collection of words, vague expressions, and a variety of anecdotes formed an ideal philosophy for the people. One of his interesting teachings was music. For Confucius, human life was related to good and bad, beautiful and not beautiful. The first one was concerned with the moral, while the second was concerned with the arts. He said that a sense of beauty was needed to be a scrupulous one (Tu Wei-Ming, 2005: 87).

### About Confucius and His Teachings

Confucius (the Latin form of the name Kong-Fu-Tse, a teacher from the Kung tribe) lived between 551-479 BC. He taught that the *tao* ("way" as the main principle of reality) was "a way for human". This means that only the man himself could make his *tao* sublime and noble, if he lived well. Prominence was the way needed. The virtue in life could be achieved through humanitarian (*yen*), which was a model for everyone. Essentially, people were all the same though their actions differed (Hamersma, 2005: 45; Fung Yu-Lan, 2007: 35-40).

Born in a poor family in Shantung, Confucius lived his career as Chief Administrator in his country. In 496 BC, he began a period of wandering with his one purpose that was to convince some of the rulers (Kings) where he layover to put into practices his work of moral doctrines (Fung Yu-Lan, 2007: 63-70). After years of his wanderings, he came back in his native region and became a master who was famous for his teachings on art, poetry, history and Chinese philosophy. All his teachings were compiled by his students in *Lun Yu* or in English known as the Analects of Confucius (Hall 2001: 55; Stevenson and Haberman, 2001: 35-36; about the Analects could be seen: Lou, Waley, 1979, and 1989).

Confucius lived during political turmoil, seizing a destroyed Chou Dynasty. Seeing that, he did some efforts to give the spirit of Confucian moral for the Kings '

power system. The moral, he said, could replace the force-and-coercion-based government to the policy-based government (Fung Yu-Lan, 2007: 40). By developing all aspects of humanity (*jen*), a person could be great in his life, and if everyone did so, then happiness could be achieved. However, according to Confucius, doing such a thing required conditions over all the rules about accuracy (*li*) in social life (Hamersma, 2005: 45). It means that morality had to stand firmly on the base of the forms of social existence. *Li* was the principle that related human appreciation to his fellows and his nature, as well as creating the nature of human which basically still could be turned to goodness. *Tao* (a way) towards all these was a life in the structures of social existence, adopting the virtues appropriate for each role, such as: children, fathers, mothers, rulers, etc.

The main emphasis of the Analect of Confucius's teachings is in humanism, not metaphysics. It could be said the main concern of Confucius is human well-being and less discussing on the ultimate nature of the world where he lives on. When people concern of worshipping Gods and spirits, Confucius replied, "You are not even able to serve men, how could serve spirits." By

avoiding the chance of metaphysics, he emphasized more on advice for running a good government that will improve the prosperity for the community and bring harmony among people (Stevenson and Haberman, 2001: 36-37).

### Music In The Perspective of Confucius

As already mentioned above that *tao* should be a base of human life. A man who lived well and in a wise manner, drove his own path of *tao* itself, so that he could distinguish good things from bad ones, between beautiful and not beautiful. Confucius said how someone with bad behavior would create beautiful things. One's inside beauty would be reflected in his work. An artist, according to Confucius, was a person who had sensitivity to the aesthetics, expected to contribute the beauty in life (Herman Tjaja, 1993: 88-89).

Confucius was a philosopher who paid attention to music as a means of aesthetic education in the framework of moral sensibility. Confucius's opinion about the music tended to be practical and transient. Music, for Confucius, was more likely to soften soul, raise the harmony between thought and action, as well as be closely related with morals (Picken, 1986-89). For

**Table 1.** The chronology of Confucius' life (Strahern, 2001: 25)

Years in BC	Moments
551	The birth of Confucius (possibly on 28 September, which is still celebrated in East Asia as the day of his birth).
	Confucius' father's death.
548	
536	Obsessed to learn.
533	Married Peiu.
About 520-510	Declaring that teaching at schools as his new "religion".
About 509-500	Appointed as the Minister of criminal in the Province of Lu.
About 500	Resigned from his position as the Minister
About 500-490	Doing pilgrimages, find a new job.
484	Returning to his homeland in the Province of Lu
479	Died at the age of 70 years.

Confucius, melody and harmony in music could adjust one's soul.

Confucius, the famous Chinese thinker and educator in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), was also an outstanding musician. Confucius not only could play many kinds of musical instruments but also was good at composing and singing. His valuable modest personality attributed to his achievement in music. After he learned *Guzhen* from the musician Shi Xiangzi for some days, the instructor said his performance was "good". Confucius, however, was not satisfied with the progress and kept training himself for a longer time. After practicing for another couple of days, his performance was regarded as "excellent" by the instructor, but Confucius still did not believe that he had reached the perfect performance because he could not feel the spirit of the melody when he played the *Guzhen*. It is not until he finally realized and showed the inner spirit of the melody that Confucius stopped practicing. His perseverance won himself the respect from Shi Xiangzi. Even today, Confucius's edification of "Being insatiable in learning" is still regarded as a motto by most people (Ames, 1987:123).

The ancient kings declared their delight with music. With music, they could lead their troops and used an axe to declare his anger. What you asked was music; what you like was sounds. Now music and sound were related, but they were not the same. All modulations of the sound skipped from the human's mind. If feeling was driven in its manifestations in the sounds; if the sounds were combined to form the composition, then, we understand what was called a song (Stevenson and Haberman, 2001: 38-60).

Confucius showed that wise men found pleasure in music, and they understood that music could please one's feeling. Since its influence was so deep to one's feeling, music could affect human beings. Due to the change, the music formed one's behaviour and habits. Ancient kings used music as one of the basic commands. So, the honor of music by the heavenly Kings

was meant to reward the most glorious kings among the feudals. If they did the virtues and they obeyed the orders, and the whole plant grains were ripe in due season, then they were honored to allow to play music (Ames and Hall, 1987: 57-90).

According to Confucius, that music brings grief to men and ruggedness in the ceremony indicated something went wrong. To create the most glorious music that did not contain the elements of grief, and to form the most complete ceremony that did not indicate irregularities, were surely just the work of a Sage. Recently, there was no end of something that could influence human beings; and when the pleasure and hatred were not set, this was caused by some strange things which presented into humans. The result was that a man deactivated the sounds of good principles, and the man gave his pleasure to his desire. So, he belonged to a rebel and a liar, and an unscrupulous behavior. The strong pushed the weak. The majority were against the minority. The knowledgeable deceived the fool. The dare ones disturbed the coward. The ill people were not treated well; the old and young, the orphan and the forgotten were denied. It's all a big mess that occurred (Ames and Hall, 1987: 80).

Confucius said that virtue was a power that came from human nature, and the music belonged to a blooming virtue. Its blossom was also aesthetical. With its aesthetically blossom, it would give blossom to life (Ames and Hall, 1987: 87).

Furthermore, Confucius said, rules resulted a clear expression of human's soul; the music gained a harmonious expression from its sounds; the government legislations were intended to uphold the ceremony and music, and the penalties were intended to keep against abuses. If the ceremony, music, law and punishment have power anywhere, without irregularity and opposition; then, the methods of the King's regulations have been done (Tu Wei-Ming, 2005: 60-67).

If the ancient kings decided their efforts, they made music to commemorate



those efforts. If they had set up governance, they devised a ceremony. The quality of their music relied on the efforts they made, and the perfection of their ceremony relied on how far their governance could be understood (Lau, 1970: 3-10).

In the context of the musical practices, Confucian said that in singing; high tones were automatically rising; low tones were automatically down as if it fell down to the ground. The up-and-down tones resembles a broken object. Final tones were similar to a broken Willow Tree. Unequivocal tones showed as if it was created by a square. The vibration was similar to catch a pike. The extended tones on the same tonality were similar to pearls tied together. So, singing was the expression of extended words. There were word expressions and if the simple expressions were not sufficient, those word expressions could be extended. If the extended ones were not enough, there came the vision and explanation. If this was still not enough, it unwittingly came hand movements and heart beats (Lau, 1970: 120).

For Confucius, in music we have expressions of feeling that did not accept any changes; in ceremonies, the principles do not accept change (alteration). Music included what both to share; a ceremony distinguished things. So the theories of music and ceremonies covered all human natures (Lau, 1970: 125).

Music was the result of sound changes (modulation), and its source was in the mind play when it was influenced by things from the outside. When the mind was grieving, the sound was sharp and erratic moves; when the mind was a joy, the sound was slow and soft. As it moved towards extremely joy, the sound was hooting and immediately vanished; in anger the mind became rough and fierce; when mood was respectful, the sound was to be honest with the impression of humble; when the mind was moved to love, the sound was harmonious and soft. Those six distinct sounds were unusual. All showed the impression resulting from external things. Over all these, the ancient kings

worried of things that could affect minds (Ames and Hall, 1987: 67-70).

Thus, according to Confucius, they had ceremonies to direct human's purpose to be right; to hold music to give harmony to their voices; to hold the law to prevent the evil tendencies. The purpose of ceremony, music, law and punishment, was one. They were instruments which corrected the souls of men, and contributed to good governance (Tu Wei-Ming, 2005: 67).

Confucius said further that music and ceremonies conducted by the ancient kings were not looking for how they could satisfy the desires, ears and eyes; but the kings aimed to teach the people to set up their feelings, and bring them back to the ways of a reasonable humanitarian (Ames and Hall, 1987: 60-70).

Inside human natures were the authority of the music; the nature of the inside rules was the inception. The result of music was a perfect music harmony; the result of ceremony was a perfect decency of obedience (Waley, 1989: 39-45). If an inside of human being was harmonious, the outer would be obedient; other people would see it on his face and not fight with him; people saw his behavior and they would not behave rough and uncared. So it could be said, "Hold the ceremony and perfect music, and give them manifestations and applications of the outside, and there was nothing under heaven difficult to run" (Lou, 1979: 26-36).

Let the music achieve results in full, and there won't be any insatiable thoughts; and let the ceremony do so, and there won't be any strife. If respect and obedience marked the rule of the Kingdom, there would be what might be called music and ceremony. The strong pressure of the people would not change; the princes would come with subservience in the palace as the guests; there won't be any chance for weapons of war, there was no implementation of five penalties; ordinary people had nothing to complain about, and the son of heaven had no reason to be angry. Such statements would be a universal music (Stevenson and Haberman, 2001: 61-73;

Lou, 1979: 78; Waley, 1989: 11).

The modulation of the sound rose from the human mind, and the music was an inside communication of the modulation in their relations and conflicts. So, any wild animals knew sounds, but not the modulation of the sound; and the set of humans knew the sound, but they did not know music. Only a superior could recognize the music.

When a man was born, it seemed that he came from heaven in peace. His behaviors showed that he was influenced by the surroundings, and these behaviors developed a desire that accompanied his nature. When his views of objects (events) increased, his knowledge increased. Then, it arose the manifestation (statements) of love and hatred. When those two things were not handled by something inside and knowledge that grew would mislead the outside, he could be hard to find himself, and the very ideal principle would be gone (Stevenson and Haberman, 2001: 36-38; Tu Wei-Ming, 2005: 11).

That was the reason why the ancient kings, when they held the ceremony and the music, they would set in order not to become a humanitarian request. With a cloth used for elderly people (the parents), lamentations and cries, they defined the terms of the mourning ceremony. With bells, drums, shields, and axes, they introduced harmony into an atmosphere of rest and joy. With the marriage, a hat, and acceptance of the hairpin (hair bun), they still retained a distinction between men and women. With archery (the art of archery) incorporated in the district, and the presence of large parties at the meetings of the Princes, they took care of the maintenance of the friendly association (Hall, 2001: 55).

The music came from within, and the ceremony came from outside. The music coming from within would create a peaceful mind; the ceremony from the outside would create flexibility; glamorous attitude. The highest musical styles were truly distinguished by excitement; the highest glamorous style was distinguished by the hidden feelings (Ames and Hall, 1987: 60-

80).

Like Confucius, harmony and unity were the goal of music; differences and disputes were the purpose of the ceremony. Of the unity, it came the feeling of love to others; of the dispute, it came the mutual respect. From those aspects, the music would exist; we find a weak rapprochement; then, the ceremony would take place, we had a tendency to split. This was a problem when human feelings involved and gave glamour to its manifestation seen from the outside (Strahern, 2001: 5).

## CLOSING

Chinese traditional music is mostly aesthetic and ethical realisms. There was an overarching principle, aesthetic and moral in nature. For Confucius, aesthetical state and regularity-based were the characters of nature. The concept of heaven or *Tao* or "the way" was essential. Heaven was the natural rules that could be accounted for, basic, and aesthetic and moral controls. Heaven was regulating not only human affairs according to moral rules, but also an attitude that inclines to the harmony and truth. Music, for Confucius, as a moral control, that is also an integrating element of heaven and the earth.

Confucius held firmly a system of "ritual" and "music" from the Zhou dynasty. He emphasized the importance of music in society and education. He praised the high quality of music that reflects the goodness and aesthetics; and taught that music in ultimate perfection could clear up one's mind.

Music, according to Confucius, was *tao* that with its aesthetics could lead human beings to the wisdom of life. Music could set the rhythm of human life to be regular and synergized; harmony in music could harmonize between minds and actions. Confucius presupposed music as a method of thinking before doing.

In the broad context and the higher respect to the value of music, Confucius even said (as quoted in Prier, 1991: 61-62): "If you want to know whether a country

has a good governance and custom, take a look at the musical works.”

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